



U.S. EMBASSY

Tripoli. LIBYA

Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs

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Remarks

Bilateral Visas Working Group

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I'm delighted to be here with you today to discuss a topic of mutual interest to our countries.

Improving the visa reciprocity regimes for travelers from the United States and Libya is an important goal. Not only would it facilitate easier travel for our citizens; it would mark a major step forward in the Libyan-U.S. bilateral relationship.

It is my hope that today's meeting will start a forward movement toward a Visa Reciprocity Agreement that will liberalize the processes and validities of visas issued by both of our countries.

As Americans, we value the universal importance of freedom of safe travel without hindrance. Indeed, the freedom of private Libyan travelers to visit the United States illustrates the U.S. commitment to our renewed bilateral relationship.

Last night, I was honored to cut a ribbon formally celebrating the opening of our new Consular Section at the Embassy. As you know, prior to December of last year, we were operating out of a temporary facility in the Saraj area of Tripoli. In the past year, we have issued nonimmigrant visas to 4,000 Libyan travelers.

I hope that many of you in this room have had or will have an opportunity to visit the United States. If you have driven on our interstate highways, maybe you remember seeing colorful road signs that mark approaching borders between our states. As you head from Georgia into Florida, for example, you see a large colorful sign saying Welcome to Florida, The Sunshine State. Just inside the state border, you're greeted by a Florida Welcome Center along the side of the highway that provides visitors information to make their stay in the state more enjoyable. The walls of the Welcome Center are lined with racks of maps and fliers from various attractions and accommodations. They used to serve tiny cups of Florida orange juice in the Welcome Centers, although I fear that budget cuts may have ended that practice.

And while we don't serve orange juice, I want you to view our consular section here in Tripoli as a Welcome Station for the United States, a symbol of American hospitality to the Libyan people, and a gateway to our countries' growing bilateral relationship.

It's my earnest hope that one day very soon the Libyan embassy in Washington will reciprocate, and welcome Americans who wish to enjoy Libya's spectacular scenery, unparalleled historic sites, and the generosity and warmth of your people. I'll be the first to recommend a visit to my compatriots, as we know that such exchanges always yield improved understanding and appreciation for one another's cultures.

We have much to accomplish today. I am honored to be here to help begin this effort with you and look forward to our discussions.